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Cover picture: Spring flowers and almond blossom on the
Mediterranean island of Mallorca



Editorial

EASTER IS THE name given to the Christian festival which commemorates the death and resurrection of Christ. The word is derived from a Saxon word (Eostre) which was the name of the goddess of Spring and in whose honour sacrifices were made at this time of the year. However, the origin of Easter goes back much further in history to the pagan cults of the ancient Babylonians who lived in Mesopotamia, now Iraq.

There is much historical evidence to confirm that the goddess of Spring was originally regarded as the mother goddess called by the Babylonians, Ishtar. She was also known as Astarte or Ashtoreth which is mentioned in the Bible and even king Solomon is recorded as becoming involved in these pagan practices [*1 Kings 11.5*]. The Goddess was worshipped as a goddess of fertility and as a sort of Mother nature. The pagan rites which surrounded this idolatrous worship were also associated with moral depravity and other evil practices.



Have you ever wondered about the origin of Easter eggs and Easter bunnies? The egg was a sacred symbol of the Babylonians. They believed that an egg fell from heaven into the river Euphrates. From this marvellous egg, the goddess Astarte had hatched. In this way the egg became a fertility symbol associated with the pagan

festival of Easter and the idea spread to many parts of the ancient world. In Rome, the mystic egg preceded processions in honour of the mother goddess. The ancient druids also used the egg as their sacred emblem. The Easter bunny or rabbit was another fertility symbol which again represented the pagan goddess.

None of these ideas are found in the teaching of the Bible. The word Easter is only mentioned once and this occurs in connection with the arrest of the apostle Peter by the Jewish authorities [*Acts 12.4 AV*]. The early English versions translated the Greek word '*pascha*' as '*Easter*,' whereas more modern versions revert to the correct translation which is '*Passover*.'

'*Passover*' is the name given to the Jewish feast that commemorated the deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt. This involved the sacrifice of a lamb and the sprinkling of its blood on the lintels and door posts of each house as commanded by God. By carefully observing this ritual, the Jews were saved from certain death at the hands of the angel of God who went through the land and killed all the firstborn of Egypt [*Exodus 12.21-30*]. The significance of the Passover feast is called to mind in the words of the Apostle Paul '*...Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us*' [*I Corinthians 5.7*].

Easter and the symbols connected with it are derived from ancient rituals associated with pagan idolatry and other evil practices. The true significance of Christ's death and resurrection and God's plan of salvation centred in him have been obscured by these pagan ideas which are part of the Easter celebrations but have no part in the worship of a true Christian. In this issue there are two articles focussing on the death and resurrection of Christ, which set out the teaching of the Bible on these fundamental issues.

Editor

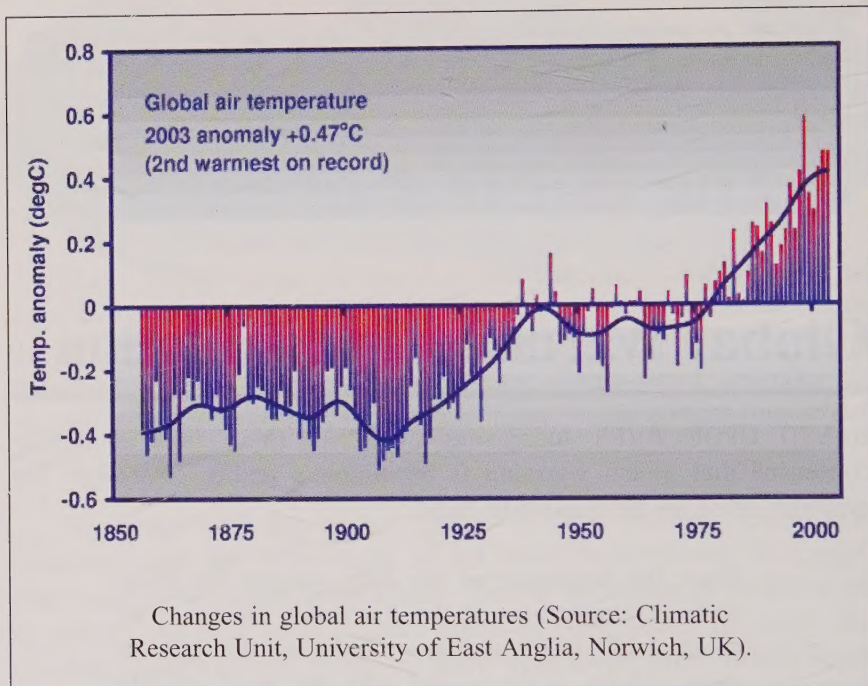


International problems the Bible's answer

Global Warming and Pollution

BASED UPON EVER increasing evidence, there is a scientific consensus that global warming is becoming a reality. Amongst the evidence cited are the following facts:

- Since the beginning of the 20th century, the mean surface temperature of the Earth has increased by about 1.1°F (0.6°Celsius) and during the last 40 years, which is the period with the most reliable data, the temperature increased by about 0.5°F (0.2-0.3° Celsius).
- Seven of the ten warmest years in the 20th century occurred in the 1990's. The hottest year was 1998, with global temperatures spiking due to one of the strongest El Niño's on record.
- Mountain glaciers throughout the world are receding and the Arctic ice pack has lost about 40% of its thickness over the past 40 years. Since 1979, the size of the summer polar ice cap has shrunk by more than 20 percent.
- The global sea level has been rising about three times faster over the past 100 years compared to the previous 3,000 years.



This graph depicting global air temperatures shows the combined global land and marine surface temperature record from 1856 to 2003. The years 2002 and 2003 were jointly the second warmest on record.

THE EFFECTS OF GLOBAL WARMING

There are various opinions about what the likely outcomes of global warming could be, but there is general agreement that there will be a faster rise in sea level leading to increased flooding. Heat waves will trigger increasing droughts and desert areas will grow in size. This will in turn lead to famine and increased conflict over scarce water resources. The year 2004 saw dramatic climatic events such as increased hurricane activity with loss of life and destruction of property.

THE CAUSES OF GLOBAL WARMING

One of the main causes of global warming is atmospheric pollution. Global temperatures have shown a sharp increase since the mid-1800's which is generally attributed to an increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO_2). This increase is largely derived from the use of fossil fuels such as coal and oil, though volcanic action also adds to the CO_2 levels in the atmosphere.

The record from ice core samples indicates that in the Earth's past, increased CO_2 has been closely associated with increased temperatures. Another gas that contributes to global warming is Methane which is 20 times more effective at trapping heat than CO_2 . Other gases which arise from industrial activity or are used in refrigeration, either contribute to global warming directly by trapping heat, or are thought to contribute to global warming by damaging the ozone layer.

Many people are justifiably concerned about the potential effects of global warming. Yet for all mankind's efforts to find solutions, including world summits, there is a lack of consensus about measures to reduce pollution. The principle cause of this disagreement is human greed. The USA has thus far declined signing up to the targets agreed for reducing the pollution from industry, transport and heating. Developing nations are more concerned with having a thriving industry and economy, than costly measures to reduce emissions.

The environment is a delicate balance of nature which mankind is polluting with disastrous results. Pollution is responsible for the destruction of plant and animal life, global warming and disease. There are vast swathes of land-fill sites vomiting methane gas and other forms of pollution into the soil. Rivers become so polluted that fish die, there is a rise in asthma and other diseases because of atmospheric pollution - the list could go on. The point is that the beauty and delicate balance of nature is destroyed because of mankind's mismanagement of the environment.

GOD WILL INTERVENE

Will God allow this situation to continue? The concept of a disaster overtaking the world is often featured in so-called 'disaster movies' but the reality of the magnitude of the changes that are going to come upon the earth cannot be appreciated. God will intervene and *'destroy those who destroy the earth'* [Revelation 11.18].



Viewed from space the Earth hangs like a magnificent jewel, resplendent in its beauty. With this knowledge which was unknown not many years ago, how is it that we continue to destroy and pollute our environment? The prophet Jeremiah recorded the reality of the situation: *'it is not*

in man who walks to direct his own steps' [Jeremiah 10.23]. The truth of these words is seen in the world around us - the mismanagement of this beautiful earth as the result of human greed, utter selfishness and blindness to the outcome for the human race.

POLLUTION OF THE MIND

Global warming brought about by atmospheric pollution is a major problem that mankind has brought upon himself, but there is a far

greater danger to the future of the human race and that is moral pollution. Not only are we destroying our environment, man is also destroying himself! The majority of people have turned far away from the principles of God's Word. The Bible is scorned as a source of moral guidance and teaching and rejected as being irrelevant in this modern world. Indeed many people even refuse to accept the existence of their Creator preferring to believe that everything we see around us is the result of blind chance!

Our minds are constantly bombarded with the noise and clamour of the world in one way or another and many people willingly add to this by polluting their own minds! I met a man once who quite openly said that he always had a radio, TV or CD on so that he was never alone with his own thoughts. How sad! This constant bombardment of trivia is something that might be termed 'mind pollution'. The minds of most people are so full of material things, that there is no room left for spiritual matters.

Little time is set aside for thoughtful contemplation about the ways of God. Yet we all have a great need to redress the balance. Just as plant life needs a healthy environment to flourish, the fertile soil of our minds will become totally unproductive in spiritual matters if we are constantly filling it with polluting influences.

GOD'S PLAN TO END POLLUTION

God has a purpose with the earth and His creation since the beginning. He has allowed a set time for man to seek his Creator and for individuals to demonstrate that they desire to seek out His ways. From Adam onwards that plan and purpose has been moving forwards inexorably towards the time when God will intervene in world affairs. God will send the Lord Jesus Christ back to the earth as promised in His Word. Jesus will set up God's kingdom on earth and then there will be a time of great change for *'out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem'* [Isaiah 2.3]. The earth will

be filled with the glory of God and there will be a time of true and lasting peace for the prophecy continues:

‘He (Jesus) shall judge between the nations, and shall rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore’ [Isaiah 2.4].

Man will no longer pollute his environment or his mind but God says through the prophet Ezekiel that a great temple will be built as a **‘House of prayer for all nations’**. The earth now is full of spiritual darkness and the majority of its people do not want to know or serve their Creator. Yet the time will come when this will change:

‘...He (God) will destroy on this mountain the surface of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations...And it will be said in that day: ‘Behold, this is our God; We have waited for him, and he will save us. This is the LORD; We have waited for Him; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation’ [Isaiah 25.7,9].

That shroud of spiritual darkness envelops all nations but it will be lifted. The peoples of the earth will then serve the Lord with one accord. Those who truly love God and believe His word can take comfort from the knowledge that God’s word cannot fail:

‘For as the rain comes down and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; It shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.’

[Isaiah 55.10,11].

God will accomplish His purpose with the earth; it is as certain as the cycle of creation. The present order of things will pass away; the problems confronting mankind will come to an end. There will be no need for conferences to talk about global warming. The Kingdom of God will be established with righteousness and be ruled justly by Jesus Christ. At that time God will bring the problem of global warming under control and turn climatic change to the benefit of mankind:

‘The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose...waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, And streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water.’

[Isaiah 35.1,6,7]

‘There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, On the top of the mountains; its fruit shall wave like Lebanon’ *[Psalm 72.16]*.

Do you want to live in a better world, one free from environmental disasters and all the other problems that beset mankind? More importantly are you looking for a world that is free from the moral pollution that afflicts society today? Consider these words:

‘Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him; and to our God, For he will abundantly pardon. ‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways my ways,’ says the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.’ *[Isaiah 55.7-9]*.

God is willing to extend His mercy and forgiveness towards those who believe His Word, have faith and are obedient to Him. To them He has

promised a new life in His Kingdom so soon to come. Will you let your mind be polluted with human ideas, or will you turn to God and put your trust in Him?

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BIBLE COURSE

The Bible Correspondence Course is in two parts. The first part gives a basic outline of what the Bible contains and its message. The second part is a more detailed study of the important Bible teaching concerning God's plan of salvation and the Christian way of life. The course is free of charge and the first lesson can be obtained by writing to:

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The Cross of Christ

THE DEATH OF Christ by crucifixion was the greatest expression of Divine love and is the focal point of God's wonderful plan of redemption. It's expressed in these well-known words from John's Gospel record:

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life' [John 3.16].

The tragic events of Golgotha were not solely governed by the evil plots of wicked men, or by the envy of those who clamoured for Christ's death. They were governed by the requirements of God's purpose.

This fact is clearly explained by the Apostle Peter: *'Him, being delivered by the carefully planned intention and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death' [Acts 2.23].* Jesus had forewarned his disciples that he must suffer the dreadful ordeal of death by crucifixion, for the Jewish leaders would *'deliver him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day he will rise again' [Matthew 20.19].*

THE TESTIMONY OF THE PROPHETS

The Old Testament prophets wrote of the sufferings of Christ and in the New Testament we see the complete fulfilment of Scripture. Zechariah wrote of his betrayal and even foretold how the blood money would be paid to the traitor Judas. [Zechariah 11.12]. David foretold the manner of his death: *'For dogs have surrounded me; The assembly of the wicked has enclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet;'* [Psalm 22.16]. The prophet Isaiah wrote: *'And they made his*

grave with the wicked – But with the rich at his death, Because he had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in his mouth' [Isaiah 53.9]. These quotations clearly indicate that the cross and all that it means was an essential part of the predetermined purpose of God.

MEANING OF THE CROSS

This can only be understood when considered in relation to God's plan declared to Moses: *'but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD.'* [Numbers 14.21]. Such a state can only come about when sin and death are abolished and the earth is peopled with an immortal and perfected race, living to the praise and glory of an all-wise and beneficent Creator.

Let us briefly consider the origin of sin and death. Man was **created** in the image of the God, given a free will and placed in Eden – the paradise of God. When subjected to a test, he was disobedient to God's law and by this he sinned. *'Sin'* wrote the Apostle John, *'is the transgression of the (Divine) law.'* [1 John 3.4 AV] But, in the loving mercy of God man was forbidden the tree of life. By this God prevented the earth from being peopled with a race of immortal sinners. The just sentence of death was pronounced on Adam and Eve as the wages of sin and as a consequence, death came to all their descendants.

We note that both Jesus and Paul endorse the Genesis account of creation. Jesus said: *'...he who made them at the beginning'* [Matthew 19.4]. Paul said: *'as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned'* [Romans 5.12]. We see therefore the need for atonement.

ATONEMENT THROUGH SACRIFICE

Adam's sin brought the awareness of nakedness and the need for clothing. Man was now alienated from God, hence the need for reconciliation. The covering devised by man was replaced by

God-provided clothing made from animal skins. This required the death of the animal and the shedding of blood. A Divine principle was established that *'without shedding of blood there is no remission.'*[Hebrews 9.22] In recognition of this principle, Abel's offering of the firstling of his flock was accepted, while Cain's offering of *'the fruit of the ground'* was rejected [Genesis 4.3-5].

During Patriarchal and Mosaic times, sacrifices were offered as a means of atonement and reconciliation. Paul shows that these offerings were types of **the one great and acceptable sacrifice of the Lamb of God.**

'For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshippers, once purged, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins' [Hebrews 10.1-4].

God's requirements could only be met by sin being condemned in the nature that had sinned; that is, by a human sacrifice: *'For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one man's obedience many will be made righteous'* [Romans 5.19].

It was necessary for a descendant of Adam, who possessed the same sin and death-stricken nature, but with a spotless and sinless character, to offer himself in sacrifice by shedding his blood, as a perfect means of **atonement for sin**, so that fallen man might be reconciled to God. This required Divine intervention because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. But all was beautifully met in Jesus Christ. Begotten of the Holy Spirit, he was the Son of

God but being born of Mary, he was Son of Man. In Jesus we see one of our nature, with sin in the flesh -- yet he was **sinless** as we are reminded in Hebrews:

‘For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.’

[Hebrews 4.15]

John the Baptist said of him: ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ [John 1.29] He was the one great offering for sin- he was **the perfect sacrifice**. ‘For by one offering he has perfected for ever those who are being sanctified’ [Hebrews 10.14]. The death of Christ was a declaration of God’s righteousness in the condemnation of sin, but because of his perfect obedience the grave could not hold him.

CHRIST THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

The Psalmist foretold: ‘you will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will you allow your Holy One to see corruption.’ [Psalm 16.10]. God raised him from the dead and gave him immortality. He now has life for bestowal on others by Divine right, ‘For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself’ [John 5.26]. Paul wrote: ‘The first man Adam became a living being. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit’ [1Corinthians 15.45].

THE GATEWAY TO LIFE OPENED FOR US

We who are sinners by nature and subject to sin, disease and death, can now become reconciled to God and receive an atonement: the forgiveness of sins through the efficacy of the blood shed on the cross. Such grace and favour can only be had by changing our relationship. We are all the children of Adam and bear his sin-cursed nature and are related only to death. ‘.. in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive’ [1Corinthians 15.22].

This change from Adam into Christ is only effected by baptism into Christ. *'For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ'* [Galatians 3.27]. To qualify for baptism we must know and express faith in the things of the Kingdom and the name of Jesus Christ. In submitting to this, our sins are remitted and we pass prospectively from death to life. *'For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death'* [Romans 8.2].

THE WORK OF RECONCILIATION

In the cross we see God's gracious work of reconciling the world and His glorious plan of redemption centred in Christ.

'But God demonstrates his own love towards us, In that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us...For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life' [Romans 5.8-10].

'...and by him to reconcile all things to himself – by him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of his cross. And you, who were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now he has reconciled' [Colossians 1.20,21].

CHRIST'S WORK NOT YET COMPLETED

The redemptive work of Christ is not limited to his death on the cross, or even his resurrection. He has promised to return to complete the work of redemption for all that are 'in' him. The majority of the saints are sleeping in death, but they died in the sure and certain hope of a resurrection to life. Jesus said: *"I am he who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore. Amen. And I have the keys of*

Hades and of death' [Revelation 1.18].

At his coming Jesus will use these keys to open the graves of those responsible and to bestow the rewards as Paul reminded the Thessalonians:

‘For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first’ [1 Thessalonians 4.16].

These, together with the responsible living, will appear at the judgement seat, where the righteous will receive **eternal life**.

Christ is also coming to set up the Kingdom of God and to reign as universal king for a thousand years. Afterwards sin and death will be abolished and the sacrificial and redemptive work will be finished in the earth, which will then be filled with the glory of the Lord. All who attain this desirable state, will do so as a result of Christ’s sacrificial death and for them his work will not have been in vain.

To the readers of ‘*Light on a New World*’ who have not yet put on the all-saving and sin-covering name of Jesus, we appeal, as Paul did: ‘*Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God*’ [2 Corinthians 5.20]. We urge you finally to think seriously about your position. Life without Christ will end in death. But life in Christ can secure everlasting joy and pleasures for evermore. This is the Gospel message spoken of by Paul:

‘For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest **the cross of Christ** should be made of no effect. For **the message of the cross** is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God’ [1 Corinthians 1.17,18].

The Reality of Christ's Resurrection

THE RESURRECTION OF Jesus Christ is either the greatest event in the history of mankind or it is the greatest fraud of all time! On the one hand we have a miracle that can transform our lives, or it is a lie that has misled millions of people into a false belief. We either have a fact on which to base the true Christian hope, that if death overtakes us, then we will like Christ be raised from the oblivion of death [*1 Corinthians 15.23*], or we have no hope at all [*1 Corinthians 15.17*]. The issue is clear: it is vital for all to study the evidence and to make a decision.

EVIDENCE OF THE WRITERS

We have the written evidence of at least six men who saw the risen Christ - Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter and Paul. In the nineteenth century many unbelieving scholars tried to prove that the Gospel records were not written until at least one hundred years after the crucifixion, in the middle of the second century AD. These attempts failed because of the vast amount of historical proof that other scholars had brought to bear on the subject. The attacks were mainly on the Gospel records and the record of the Acts of the Apostles.

The writings of Paul were not called into question so much and there are few scholars today who doubt the genuineness of the Pauline writings. The letters to the Thessalonians are accepted as being written AD 50-51 and to the Corinthians AD 55-56. The charge that the Gospels and Acts contained glaring historical inaccuracies has been refuted by archaeology. Practically all the towns and cities mentioned

in those books have been located with 'finds' which have fully vindicated the historical accuracy of the writers.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Even when attacked from a linguistic point of view, the New Testament has won the battle. The oldest New Testament manuscripts were written in Greek, but a form of Greek unknown to classical literature. Many words were said by critics to have been of a much later date than the first century AD. However, from many finds of papyrus inscriptions dating from the first century and earlier, it was found that this language was known as 'koine' Greek and was the common language of the Mediterranean world during the time of Christ and the Apostles. There are similar papyrus records that demonstrate the first century origin of all the Gospels and the Acts. From this, the date and reliability of the writers has been and can be further established.

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED?

We have next to consider whether the resurrection of Christ described by them, ever really took place, or whether it was a deliberate invention on their part. History relates two facts - firstly that Jesus was crucified and secondly that three days later, his body had disappeared from the tomb. These facts are confirmed by two independent witnesses. Tacitus, the Roman historian about AD 110, tells of the early Christians and their leader Christus, from whom they got their name. This Christus, Tacitus says, had to be executed by sentence of Pontius Pilate when Tiberius was Emperor. About the end of the first century AD, Josephus the Jewish historian wrote about Jesus in this fashion:

'Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works...He was the Christ; and when

Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold...’ [Josephus: *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 18 chapter 3.3].

There are a number of suggestions put forward as to what really happened. The first, recorded by Matthew, was that the disciples stole the body and then made up the tale of Christ’s resurrection. Let us think about this. There was a guard at the tomb – Roman soldiers, who, it was said, fell asleep. For this failure of duty they would have been executed, so that possibility was very unlikely. If they had fallen asleep, was it feasible that the heavy stone could have been rolled away without waking them? If the disciples had succeeded in this unlikely adventure and hidden his body elsewhere, how could they have shown that conviction that suddenly possessed them?

THE DISCIPLES HAD RUN AWAY - BUT NOW...

The sudden change that came over these weak, frightened, doubting men, turning them into bold and powerful preachers of the Gospel of salvation, can surely only be explained by the fact that they had, as they said, *seen, talked to and touched* their risen Lord. It is not possible that the driving force behind these men could be the decaying remains of their Master.

It is also most likely that in the agonies and martyrdom that most of them suffered, one of them would have confessed, if they had been guilty of a great deception. Materially they gained nothing from their preaching. Rather they were persecuted and looked upon as fanatics. Those who had run away when Jesus was arrested, later died unafraid, with the unchanged message on their lips, *that Christ was risen*. Men do not suffer as they did and die for something that they know to be a lie.

Another theory put forward is that Christ was not dead when taken down from the cross, but was in a faint from exhaustion. When laid in the cool tomb, he revived, eventually coming to his disciples, who being ignorant men, thought that he had risen from the dead. The facts tell us otherwise – but let us suppose that this was so. Is it possible that a man who had hung nailed to a cross, who had had a spear driven into his side, who had lost so much blood, who had been wrapped from head to foot in bandages, could not only have set himself free, but also could have survived for three days without food, water or medical attention and then found the strength to roll away that stone, get past the guards and to walk on those cruelly pierced and wounded feet for some miles?

We suggest that this theory is utter nonsense. Professor Rendle Short, late Professor of Surgery at Bristol University writes: *'As a result of the spiritual and physical agony endured by Christ, a condition of acute dilation of the stomach, may have developed and the spear wound drew watery fluid from the stomach and blood from the heart and great vessels of the thorax. Needless to say such a wound would be instantly fatal if the victim was not already dead, as indeed he was. [The Bible and Modern Medicine page 96].*

Quite apart from this, if Jesus had revived in this way and told his disciples he had risen from the dead, he himself would have been guilty of a deliberate lie, an act quite different in character from those of the man portrayed in the Gospels. Had this been so, what would have become of him after he left the disciples? Is it possible that a man so ready to deceive and seeing how successful his deluded followers were in their preaching (thousands were converted) would have refrained from coming forward to recognise their acclaim? This would have been more in character with such a person, but it certainly was not so with the Christ we learn about in the Scriptures.

Other theories have been put forward in an attempt to explain away the miracle of Christ's resurrection, like delusions, hallucinations

and legend. Some even maintained that the authorities, Roman and Jewish, took away the body. If this were true, they could have silenced Christianity forever **by producing the body**. The facts are that within two months of the crucifixion, Jerusalem was alive with the preaching of Christ's resurrection and the only complaint the authorities made was that the Apostles were trying to '*bring this man's blood on us*' [Acts 5.28].

THE REAL EXPLANATION

The sudden change that came over the Apostles can *only* be explained by their having seen the risen Christ. It must be recalled that far from expecting Christ to rise from the dead, the Apostles had no idea that this was behind Christ's teaching. When he was taken and crucified they were shattered, broken, unhappy men and when he appeared to them they were caught by surprise. Their reaction was one of disbelief and doubt! It is quite clear that the disciples did not convince themselves that Christ was risen.

Christ had to convince them – and convinced they were, as were many other people who all *saw* the risen Christ at the same time. Some years later, Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth and presented the arguments for the resurrection:

'For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received; that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he was seen of Cephas, then by the twelve. After that he was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that he was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all he was seen by me also...'

[I Corinthians 15.3-8]

From these eye-witnesses came the powerful message of salvation through Christ. Suddenly they realised the true teaching of all that was in the Law and in the prophets:

‘But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all his prophets, that the Christ would suffer, he has thus fulfilled’ [Acts 3.18].

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Many of those things recorded about the Messiah, from Moses to Malachi, had now been fulfilled, all the laws of the Old Testament Scriptures took on a new significance. They could see that the requirements of the Law all pointed forward in type or symbol to the greater sacrifice of the Lamb of God to take away the sins of mankind. For the disciples, the veil was suddenly lifted from their eyes (a veil that unfortunately is still there for many) and what was once a little company of sad and dejected men, **turned into a force with an irresistible message that spiritually and politically turned the world upside down!**

The burning conviction of their testimony converted thousands of people to a fresh understanding of the Old Testament scriptures. Three thousand people on one occasion [Acts 2.41] and five thousand men on another [Acts 4.4]. What were they saying to have this astounding effect? Peter’s words demonstrate the reality of Christ’s resurrection:

‘This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses’ [Acts 2.32].

‘The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree...And we are his witnesses to these things’ [Acts 5.30-32].

These are the most valued witnesses in a court of law today - eyewitnesses. As Peter wrote later: *‘For we did not follow cunningly*

devised fables...but were eyewitnesses of his majesty' [2 Peter 1.16]. Here was the conviction of men who were far from deluded and simple-minded! Such was the impact of their teaching that 'a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith [Acts 6.7].

This fact in itself was no mean achievement. The resistance put up by the Jewish religious leaders was something that could not easily be overturned by '*unlearned men*' without the force of truth behind them. The Jews had kept their Sabbath on Saturday for more than a thousand years but suddenly these converts began to keep a new day apart, the first day of the week i.e. Sunday. It could obviously only have been an event of such startling significance as the resurrection of Christ which broke the Jews away from an ordinance to which they were so attached.

TESTIMONY OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

The sudden breakdown of the prejudice the Jews had toward the Gentiles was a remarkable thing. We find that Jews and Gentiles joined hands in the name of the living Christ. The foremost teacher of this was the Apostle Paul, a traditional Jew himself and formerly a Pharisee. He wrote to the Galatians: '*There is neither Jew nor Greek (Gentile)... you are all one in Christ Jesus [Galatians 3.28].*

As the writer of at least thirteen of the books of the New Testament, this man Paul is recognised (even by the critics) as a man of great intellect. As Saul of Tarsus he was one of the main persecutors of the early believers [Acts 26.8-20]. He was in his own words '*a Pharisee the son of a Pharisee*' [Acts 23.6]. Brought up in the strict manner of the law of the Jewish fathers, Paul knew all about this Jesus from Nazareth and was acquainted with the teaching of Christ. His whole life as an orthodox Jew was set against this new preaching and he zealously assisted those who wanted to destroy it.

What then could turn this persecutor of those of '*the Way*' [Acts 9.2] into a zealous exponent of that same '*Way*'? This sudden reversal

in the convictions of Paul can only be explained by the fact that he **saw** and **talked** with the risen Christ himself. His life and writings are sufficient evidence to convince us that Paul was a man of integrity, to prove the genuineness of his conversion and also to convince us of the fact of Christ's resurrection.

We can sum up by saying that the growth and spread of Christianity can only be accounted for by an initial event that had a tremendous impact on the followers of Christ, **the fact of the resurrection of Christ**. This miraculous event was followed by the further miracle of these same men being guided by Spirit power, enabling them to speak and act with God-given wisdom. The Scriptures they have recorded affirm that we worship not a dead teacher or leader, but that we follow the ever-living Son of God, our Saviour. He is now at the right hand of his Father's throne waiting for the Father's command to return to this earth and make the nations his own.

Paul took the message of Christ's resurrection throughout the Roman world. The book of Acts is a record of his journeys in the service of his Master. In Athens, he preached the risen Christ to the Greeks who were mainly idolaters. He called on them to repent and worship the one true God – and why?

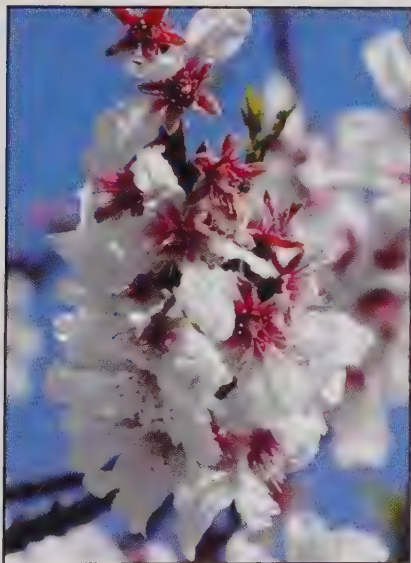
‘because he (God) has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained. **He has given assurance of this to all, by raising him from the dead.**

[Acts 17.31]

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Plants of the Bible

The Almond



THE ALMOND, *Prunus dulcis*, a medium-sized tree, belongs to the rose family. It is one of the first trees to bloom in Israel - from mid February and long before the leaves burst. Its beautiful flowers open on the bare branches, when other trees are still dormant, as a precursor of spring and a symbol of resurrection.

The Hebrew for almond is *shaqad* and comes from a root word signifying to awaken; to be alert; sleepless and make haste. The ‘wake-tree’ was a reminder to the Jews that winter was passing, that soon flowers would cover the earth, birds would sing and the voice of the

turtledove would be heard again in the land [*Song of Songs 2.11,12*].

Although almond blossom is tinged pink, it looks snowy-white when seen *en masse* from a distance. Thus it was the symbol of hoary-headed old age and the nearness of the end of life [*Ecclesiastes 12.5*]. This is a reminder of our mortality and that, apart from God’s offer of eternal life through Jesus Christ, the grave beckons to each one of us. We must ‘wake’ up to that fact. On the other hand, the spring flowering ‘wake tree’ also points forward to resurrection, not to dying but to living forever with Jesus when he returns.

There is a mass of blossom for about a month. The fruit sets and swells until eventually the fleshy case dries up and splits lengthwise. The oval nuts are ready for harvesting during November after which they are dried.

The delicious kernels of the sweet or Jordan almond have a delicate brown skin but are a rich creamy white when peeled. They are eaten either raw or roasted, they are blanched or made into a paste for use in confectionery, pastries and marzipan and they contain about 50% fat. A smooth, pleasantly flavoured, low-cholesterol oil is extracted from the kernels of sweet almonds for cooking purposes; 114lbs (51.7kg) of fruit may yield 50 lbs (22.7kg) of oil. Oil from bitter almonds is poisonous until refined; it can then be used in flavouring, in cosmetics and perfumes, or as a fine lubricant.

Bitter almond trees were more prevalent in Bible times and could be used as rootstocks onto which the sweet-seeded varieties could be grafted. Sweet almonds need a warmer climate than the ornamental cultivars, which thrive in cooler areas such as the pink flowered ornamental almond often grown in Britain. This has bitter somewhat inedible nuts; they each contain a minute amount of prussic acid (cyanide).

In ancient times, the valuable nuts were traded for costly spices between many countries around the Mediterranean. Throughout the era of the Maccabees (312-63 BC) the almond was the design on the shekel.

Almonds are first mentioned in Genesis where Jacob describes them as one of *'the best fruits in the land'* (of Israel). He sent a present of *'a little balm and a little honey, spices and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds'* [Genesis 43.11] to his son Joseph (at that time the most prominent official in Egypt) with a request for corn. It was at a time of famine in Israel so the almonds would have enhanced merit as none were grown in Egypt.

The almond is depicted as ornamentation in the design of the six-branched candlestick made by the Israelites for placing in the tabernacle during their wanderings in the Sinai desert. In practice, it was a lampstand – the six branches actually were for lamps and not candles. The description of the lampstand reads: *‘three bowls shall be made like almond blossoms on one branch, with an ornamental knob and a flower; and three bowls made like almond blossoms on the other branch, with an ornamental knob and a flower - and so for the six branches that come out of the lampstand. On the lampstand itself four bowls shall be made like almond blossoms, each with its ornamental knob and flower’* [Exodus 25.33,34]. These ‘bowls’ and ‘knobs’ refer to a particular stage in the growth of the embryonic fruit where there is a cup-shape formation consisting of a knob and the remains of a flower.

The Psalmist explains that the lampstand signifies the Word of God. He declared *‘Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path’* [Psalm 119.105]. The ‘**wakeful**’ almond element is a reminder that God is ever alert in ensuring that the promises and prophecies in His word are fulfilled in due time. The almond motifs also emphasised to the priests the importance of not oversleeping, of being awake, ready for dressing the lamps with oil early each morning [Exodus 30.7] so that they would *‘burn continually’* [Exodus 27.20].

The almond features in an amazing incident in the desert of Midian when there was a challenge from Korah, Dathan and Abiram against the leadership of Moses and the priesthood of Aaron [Numbers 16.3]. Twelve dormant rods were placed in the tabernacle, each one inscribed with a name from a tribe, with Aaron’s name on the rod for Levi [Numbers 17.1-5]. Aaron’s was the only rod that *‘on the next day’*, not only budded, but also bloomed and produced almonds, symbolically giving Aaron authority to lead Israel and also confirming his status as high priest.

In Hebrew, the words *‘yielded ripe almonds’* [Number 17.8], signify *‘to ripen’* or *‘mature’*, so it was miraculous that a dormant branch

could develop fruit so quickly, with three stages of growth appearing simultaneously overnight. It is a reminder too, of the statement of Scripture that, *'by the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established'* [Matthew 18.16]. Aaron's authority was undoubtedly established by this miracle. The threefold miracle countered any suggestion of fraud by Moses in substituting overnight a living branch for the dormant one. A dormant rod was then placed permanently in the tabernacle as a continual reminder to Israel of the futility of rebelling against God.

The miracle pointed forward to Christ the Branch [Isaiah 4.2; 11.1]. In the tomb, he was a lifeless body which miraculously 'sprouted' at his resurrection and elevation to the right hand of his Father in heaven, ready to return to this earth to bear fruit by becoming the king of the whole world.

The final reference in Scripture to the almond tree is in a vision seen by Jeremiah in which he was asked to look into the future. He saw, in the rod of an almond tree, its '**hastening**' aspect - even hastening great disaster and judgment upon his nation because it had rejected the authority of God. *'Thou hast well seen: for I will hasten my word to perform it'*. [Jeremiah 1.11,12. AV]. The sign was an assurance to him that the prophecies of doom he had repeatedly proclaimed would come to pass.

Like the almond, the fig tree is a symbol of the nation of Israel. Fulfilling a happier prophecy of Jesus the fig tree sprouted in 1948 with the establishment of the State of Israel [Luke 21.29-31]. In due time, its young buds grew into the progressive nation we know today. When Christ, the Branch - the Messiah who was rejected by the Jews, returns to establish God's kingdom on earth, they will bear fruit in finally recognising him as the Son of God and their Redeemer.

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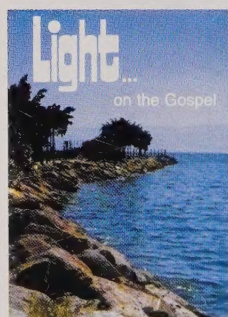
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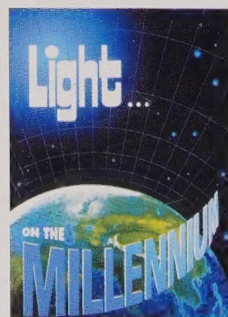
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